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# THE INWARD LIGHT AND CHRIST'S INCARNATION.

BY

## WILLIAM TALLACK

(AUTHOR OF 'PENOLOGICAL AND PREVENTIVE PRINCIPLES').

Reprinted from the 'Friends' Quarterly Examiner' for January, 1892.

LONDON

EDWARD HICKS, JUN., 14, BISHOPSGATE WITHOUT, E.C.

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# THE INWARD LIGHT AND CHRIST'S INCARNATION.

IT used to be the belief of the Society of Friends as a body, though now perhaps held by only a minority in its ranks, that there operates everywhere, in the hearts of all God's human family, at least some spark of that which the founders of Quakerism were wont to term "Universal and Saving Light," or more simply, "The Inward Light." In consequence of certain modern perversions of this doctrine, of painful historic notoriety, it has apparently been too much and too often relegated to inattention, or even doubt, during latter years. But it has, nevertheless, a certain preciousness of its own, especially as tending to the glory of God and the vindication of His gracious justice towards all His poor children on the earth. And it is still abundantly warranted by observation and by fact.

Recently, the writer met, in a railway carriage, two thoughtful persons, long and usually still resident in India; and the conversation turned upon matters connected with religion, missions, opium, and caste, in that vast country, points respecting each of which some interesting information was given. Amongst other subjects, these persons spoke with profound respect of the old Friends' views on the Inward Light, and they bore willing testimony to the good qualities of the Hindoos as a race, even though pagans. They said, "We love the Hindoos; they are so faithful to us and so honest. When at home, we generally leave the doors of our house

open, by day and by night, and with safety. We have sixty servants, and they will look well to our interests in our absence; they are a fine people, although not Christians."

Many other Indian residents and visitors have made similar declarations. Thus a writer of 'Letters

on Eastern Travels ' has observed :-

"These poor Indians bore, in their every action, honest Christian fruits, but are despised because they do not bear the name. They are truthful, patient, meek, gentle, temperate, industrious, clean, satisfied with their wages, despising wealth and luxury, uncomplaining, obedient, satisfied with their lot. Are not all these things Christian fruits, virtues and graces? They are Gentiles who, having not the Law, do the things contained in the law written in their hearts, and have a witness that they are born of God. I love the Indians, as being Christians in deed, as being well known and accepted by Christ, because they have His nature, though they know Him not by name."

Some Friends have severely criticised these remarks, and have replied, "Indians, Christians in nature! why look at their vile idolatry, with its unspeakable debasements." But it must be remembered that, everywhere, evil is side by side with good. No Indian debasement can be worse than those vices associated with the unnatural and wicked system of the Roman Confessional and its enforced celibacy. No cruelty can exceed, if indeed possibly equal, the literal devilries of the so-called "Holy Inquisition" in the past, to say nothing of "Christian" Russia's barbarities to Jews and prisoners, in the present. And are the vices of paganism so very much worse than the too manifest licentiousness of Paris, London, Berlin, or Chicago? Nay, even amongst the votaries at the "Holiness Conventions" of Mildmay, Keswick, and Northfield, are there no uglinesses of temper and conduct? And even gross scandals occasionally occur amongst the very highest professing Christians; such as the recent case of the President of one of the largest of the Young Men's Christian Associations in America, who, like the President of an American Temperance Society also, was convicted of gigantic frauds. precisely because it would be unfair, from such occurrences, to disparage true Christianity itself, it is similarly unreasonable to undervalue the preciousness of those gleams of Universal Light, which, all along through the ages, have shone forth, even amid the surrounding darkness of paganism, and even though that darkness has so often appeared to have quenched or eclipsed this Light. No. "God hath not left Himself without Witness," during every period of human existence on this earth.

Two works have recently been published in London, namely, 'The Unknown God,' by C. Loring Brace, and 'Physical Religion,' by Professor Max Müller, which afresh draw attention to the varied and abundant historic proofs of the operation, in all ages, of this Universal Light and Inward Voice of God.

"That which mystic Plato pondered, That which Zeno heard with awe, And the star-rapt Zoroaster In his night-watch saw."

Professor Max Müller dwells especially upon the purity and beauty of the truths embodied in the Indian Rig Vedas (literally Rythmic Lore), the antiquity of which is estimated by the most competent scholars, at periods of at least 1000 to 1500 years before the Christian era. Mr. C. L. Brace takes a wider sweep over the ancient religions; but both writers substantially agree in their general conclusions. A smaller work, by Miss A. C. Randell, of Bath, entitled 'Pagan Pearls,' treats of the same interesting topic.

A very few of the ancient gems of wisdom collected in these three books may be here appropriately introduced.

A Vedic prayer pleads, "Unite Thou my soul with that Universal Spirit which directs mankind, as a charioteer guides his steeds." Another Indian utterance of extreme antiquity strikingly anticipates a precept uttered many hundred years later by the Lord Jesus, "Lay up for yourself treasure which kings cannot command, nor thieves take away, the only good thing which, being dead, thou canst still possess."

The Accadians, or mountaineer tribes of earliest Babylonia, whose city Akkad is mentioned in Genesis x. 10, as in "the beginning" of Nimrod's kingdom, had a series of sacred Psalms remarkably resembling those of David, who lived probably a thousand or more years subsequently. One of these old Accadian hymns beautifully prays, just like the later Psalmist:—

"God, my Creator, stand by my side!

Keep Thou the door of my lips, guard Thou my hands,
O Lord of Light!"

Another of their prayers addressed to the Mediator is, "Thou art the Life-giver. Thou art the Saviour! the Merciful One among the gods! Cure thou this

plague!"

Yet another of these Accadian Psalms, of the world's morning dawn, exhorts, "Pray thou: pray thou. Before the couch, pray. Before the dawn is light, pray. By the tablets and books, pray. By the hearth, by the threshold, at the sun-rising, at the sun-setting, pray!"

Then, coming nearer towards the Christian era, we find, still and everywhere, the evidences of this sacred Inward Light. Thus the later Brahmins in

India prayed :-

"O God of Gods, Thou art to me Father, mother, kinsmen, friends; I, knowledge, riches, find in Thee; All good, Thy Being comprehends!"

And the old Orphic Hymns of early Greece thus acknowledge the unity of Deity:—

"Zeus is first, Zeus last, origin of all, King of all, One power, one Ruler, one God."

And every reader of the grand poet Æschylus knows how he reiterates the majesty of all-ruling Law and Righteousness; and he sings:—

"Still there dwells beside the throne of Zeus The Eternal Right that rests on oldest Laws."

The Greek Isocrates virtually anticipated the Christian Golden Rule, when he said, "Do not to others what you would not suffer from them, and be towards others what you would wish I should be towards you." Buddha (B. C. 550) said, "Let a man overcome evil by good." Many other of his precepts were remarkably in accord with the teachings of the then future Christ. Laotze, the Chinese philosopher (B. C. 600), said, "Recompense injury with kindness." Confucius gave a similar precept.

The ancient Persians, about four or five centuries before Christ, were exponents of much excellent wisdom, portions of which were embodied in the Zend-Avesta of Zoroaster, one of whose prayers is, "O Lord, All-knowing, may we attain to union with

Thy purity, for all eternity!"

The Buddhist system dwelt greatly on the Divine mercy. One of the most favourite figures of Buddha is inscribed, "God in the form of Mercy." And a modern traveller found, on the Himalayas, a tablet with the words, "To despair of the goodness of God, this is infidelity"—a doctrine which, from the earliest ages of Buddhism, has been its characteristic. And

it is but fairness to Buddhism, or rather to the measure of Divine revelation therein, to acknowledge that it gave a far higher degree of prominence to the duty of Kindness to Animals than even the Bible itself has done. And to this day, in this respect, the practices of Christian nations are far behind those where Buddhism and Brahminism have their votaries.

Socrates, Plato and the Stoics (such as Epictetus, Zeno, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius) gave forth utterances so remarkably in unison with the Christian and Jewish Scriptures that many persons have insisted that the latter must have been in degree known to them. Yet this assumption is very doubtful, so far as historic proof may be forthcoming. The Emperor Marcus Aurelius exhorts, "Look within; the fountain of good is there; and it will flow on for ever, if thou wilt for ever dig." And what a beautiful prayer, as appropriate for all of us to-day as when it was recorded long ages back, is thus expressed by the Stoic, Simplicius, "I supplicate, O Lord, that Thou wouldest wash away the dust of our spirit-eyes, that we may know well both God and man!"

Lastly, in the vast Continent unknown to Greek, or to Roman, to Prophet or to Apostle, the same Eternal Spirit breathed, throughout the ages, in the hearts of His human family. The ancient Peruvians taught of One, existing "from the beginning and unto the end, Powerful and Pitiful." Whilst the North American Indians so reverentially and practically adored "the Great Spirit," that it is needless to make further reference to so well known a fact. William Penn made this a basis of his religious and social procedure, in regard to the Indians—just as the Apostle Paul, in preaching to the Athenians, based his sermon on the same great truth of a Universal Light—a Light aided and confirmed by the

lessons of outward Nature and Providence. The poet Whittier, who, as in the four lines already quoted from him, habitually renders homage to this grand principle, has expressed, on more than one occasion, his deep regret that most of his countrymen who, in the Western States, assume the name of "Friends," have practically dishonoured this blessed Divine immanence, whilst some of their leaders have even gone so far as to deny the Inward Light altogether, in the general sense of the term.

Yet this truth of the Inward Light may be blessedly

used or mischievously abused.

Its use consists, of course, mainly in saving obedience on the part of its reverent recipients. But, in addition, it is promotive of the Divine glory, by vindicating God's justice and fairness. It throws precious light on the otherwise solemn enigma of the future destiny of the millions of millions of human beings who have lived without seeing a Bible, and gone down to the grave without hearing of God's exceeding love in the gift of His dear Son, as the Saviour and Redeemer of the world. Professor Max Müller well remarks, "I know no heresy more dangerous to true religion, than the denial that a true concept of God is within the reach of every human being." Yet how often, by religionists of the self-styled "orthodox" school, such assumptions are entertained and promulgated, to the dishonour of the Highest!

But, on the other hand, this precious truth may be, and has been, greatly abused, when it is made a reason for indolence in missionary or evangelistic effort, or for withholding the Holy Scriptures from universal distribution. For the Inward Light, in any form apart from the revelation of the personal sympathizing love of God in the Incarnation, is at best but as twilight, compared to noonday. The

Natural or Universal Religion which the Apostle, in the first chapter of the Romans, describes as "being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead," can only develop a stage of religious childhood, and necessarily leaves very much more to be desired for the soul's growth. Nature does not always reveal God as a pitying, sympathizing, compassionate Father. As the poet says, she is so often "red in tooth and claw." eternal power of Godhead, if regarded alone, may seem as the cold strength of cast-iron to the poor, frail, yearning soul of man, amid his perplexities and trials. Far more august was the infinite condescension of the Highest, when, through the fulness of the Eternal Spirit, His dear Son was born at Bethlehem. And most truly, over the Advent of that sacred historic Child, born of a human mother, was raised the Augelic Anthem of "Glory to God in the highest." Most truly, too, was this proof of God's infinite love characterized, by an inspired writer, as being, in supreme degree, "the brightness of the Father's glory," and, in that sense, more glorious than any other power of Godhead or of Nature, yet revealed to man.\* For Love is a higher glory than Power, both in God and in man. And sympathy is sweeter than knowledge, whether in human or Divine procedure.

A personally sympathizing God was never fully revealed by Nature, or by the Inward Light, before the Incarnation and its witnessing. Hence the comparative coldness attendant on all devotion apart

from God's personality in Christ.

But further, light, even Divine light, does not necessarily give power over evil. The essence and basis of human responsibility consists in the freedom

<sup>\*</sup> We rightly honour, love, and pray to the Supreme Father, in His own abiding Centre of personality, the glorified and risen Christ Jesus.

of the will. Mere moral machines can do neither right nor wrong. A love forced by command and a service merely impelled by fear, are little removed from being spurious in each case. What was there, or what is there, in the Universal Inward Light to win love in special degree? What comparative deficiency of power against sin characterizes it, in its best manifestations, apart from the Gospel! It has, under such conditions, less power than even the animating life and death of the martyr or the patriot. But the light of the voluntary death of the historic Christ gives Him a constraining and attractive glow for ever. For He was no compulsory martyr. As He declared, "I lay down my life of myself; and no man taketh it from Me." And to prove this, at the moment of His arrest, at Gethsemane. He caused his captors to fall prostrate to the ground. He could have annihilated Jerusalem and the Roman Empire in an instant, if He had wished it. But no. He voluntarily placed Himself on the great Altar of the Cross,—"Himself the Victim and Himself the Priest,"—that thus, by "tasting death for every man," He might win souls for ever to a willing homage and a devoted love. His children will see this clearly in the light of Eternitywhere the grand Anthem evermore arises, "To Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood—to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever!"

If to the Greek there was an animating call to honour and patriotism, derived from the memory of those brave men who died for their country at Thermopylæ, or in "the fore-front of Marathon"; if, to the Englishman, even to the most peace-loving, there should ever be a respectful regard for those heroic patriots who, in resisting the vast Spanish Armada, helped, though in chief degree

with the aid of God's "stormy wind fulfilling His word," to ward off from our beloved land the demoniac yoke of the Spanish Inquisition, how incomparably greater is the claim of that most Precious Blood, which was shed to win our souls to holy love to God and man, and to open Immortality to our race! How often is that most solemn of all expressions, "Washed in the Blood," merely sung as a hymn-chorus, with a most inadequate sense of its meaning and import! And how can there be any "washing," at all, to the soul which that dying love does not deeply impress and effectually arouse to obedient and life-long efforts of service? Or how can anyone expect to be justified by Christ's "imputed" righteousness, if he carelessly glides along through life in willing sin, and presumptuously expects the "white robe" to be made to cover a negligently uncleansed career? But to the sincere soul, longing to serve and love God, what an animating and abiding fount of impulse is afforded by the love of the Almighty Father in the Son of His own Divine essence! Before this revelation of spiritstirring love was manifested, it might be truly said, in a certain measure, "The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that [God in] Jesus was not yet glorified." For in this love, as in inferior degree in human love, that which is really spiritual is largely dependent upon influences of physical flesh and blood. Our deepest spiritual feelings are most closely associated with matters of corporeal sensation and personal sympathy. And it is only a false and spurious "spirituality" which can divest itself of these. Hence the Universal Inward Light is rudimentary and embryonic, apart from the essential developments of those influences of the Incarnation, which are the basis and source of the highest and deepest gifts of the Holy Spirit of God Himself.

Lastly: there was one great void—one vast blank —which nothing but God's love in His dear Son has ever filled—namely, the previous absence of all certainty of human conquest over death. The old Egyptians far surpassed the Jews in their ideas of future existence. But not even the Universal Inward Light had ever brought to them, or others, an assurance of victory over the Great Fear, until the introduction of the Great Hope through Christ's Resurrection. The noblest of the heathen, such as Plato and Socrates, had, at best, a faith which was as a guess, a conjecture. How sad their hopelessness under bereavement! But what a world of difference there is between the obituary inscriptions of the pagan Romans,—recording their sense of irreparable loss, at the decease of their "most dear" wives and daughters and sons,—as compared with the later Latin inscriptions on the Christian dead: "In hope,"—"In peace,"—"In Christ." It was not a mere change. It was a revolution in human history. even in the history, and life, and hope, and impulse, of the inmost souls of men.

And what brings this hope still to the poor Buddhist, or Hindoo, or Chinese, or Japanese? Not the Inward Light, blessed, in its limited degree, though it be; not even that, but only the Gospel record of the historic Christ, "the first-begotten from the dead," who, alone but finally, has conquered death and "opened the Kingdom of Heaven," with its immortal youth and its glorious processes of eternal education, "to all believers."

Only a few weeks ago, the writer heard a well-meaning Friend preach a sermon, in which he dwelt upon the Saviour as being "the Christ born within us and crucified within us." Now this will not do. This does not glorify God's great love wherein He "suffered in the flesh." Such a perversion of the

Inward Light which is breathed from the risen historic Christ is not true spiritual teaching. It has wrought great mischief amongst Friends in the past. We cannot love a light, even Divine, as we can love a human sympathy proved by human suffering in the flesh. And hence the beloved Apostle John most solemnly declares that the truest spirituality is inseparable from a lively adherence to the animating truths of the historic Incarnation of Him of whom he and the other Apostles recorded "that which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life." No "spirituality" can be genuine, but only spurious, which practically volatilizes Christ, and evaporates Him into an airy essence, if one may use the expression, which did not inhabit a mortal body or participate to the full in its trials and temptations. The Apostle fixes for us, evermore, the standard of true spiritual Christianity when he proclaims, "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God. And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is not of God; and this is that spirit of anti-Christ."

The test of true spirituality is love rather than light. The best and truest and intensest human love is the conjugal, or combined physical and spiritual. And it is the same with Divine love. The combination of the awful, but most precious, reality of Christ's death in the body and resurrection in the body, for us, furnishes the basis and source of the profoundest work of His own Holy Spirit upon the souls of His children. Yes, all profession, or preaching of a merely inward Christ, however solemn its claims, is but a pseudo-Christianity, and a delusive and counterfeit "spirituality." But this has ever

been the special snare of Quakerism.

We have the Holy Spirit precisely in the proportion

in which the historic Christ is precious to us, and the measure in which we feel the necessity of His sufferings, in manifesting an all-compassionate love, with the immaculately crystalline sanctity of the Eternal Father, of an infinite Majesty. "It behoved Christ to suffer." And we may believe that all the manifestations of the "Inward Light" before the Incarnation, as well as since, were inseparably dependent on, and essentially given through, the sacrifice of "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." He was a sacrifice showing the inviolable majesty of Divine law and purity. And also there was this: the millions of sacrifices of earlier ages had been made by man to God. But on Calvary, God sacrificed Himself to man: stooped from the infinite heights, and, with that sublime self-denial, transcended immeasurably all the combined sacrifices which all the best of mothers, wives, daughters, patriots, had ever before made to man, for the blessing of the race, and the drawing out of reciprocal love and joy.

It may be briefly observed, in conclusion, that this truth of a Universal and Inward Light is one of solemn and humbling import to each one of us, who is favoured with the brighter revelation of the Gospel, because thereby we have a greater responsibility for faithfulness, and a stronger call to grateful homage to the Highest, than any of the poor pagans, in their dim and rudimentary measure of illumination. Lord declared that it shall be "more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, and even for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the Day of Judgment," than for the negligent, or disobedient Jew, gifted with the Revelation of the Old Testament. But upon us who have, in addition, the completing record of the New Testament, what an added responsibility is imposed! And how humbling is the reflection to us that, even with our floods as of noonday light, we are often so little in

advance of, if indeed we are not often positively behind, the measure of good disposition, of loving obedience, and of self-denying virtue, so abundantly manifest in myriads of those who, both in ancient and modern ages, have only had the limited gift of the Inward Light of universal humanity, without the Christian's special privilege of the incomparably higher blessings of the spoken and written revelation of the Almighty Father's boundless love, in the once crucified, but for ever risen, Person of His own dear Son.

### NOTE.

Since writing the above, the author has observed in a public journal a letter from a well-known English "Friend," claiming that the Early Friends were guided by the Holy Spirit into a more correct view of Christ's salvation than other Christians generally. And he quotes with approval the statement that—"The Evangelical sects declared and still declare the central truth of their faith to be the Death of Christ. The Early Friends, going wider and deeper, proclaimed their great central and foundation truth to be Christ Himself, the living Saviour."

This assertion appears to be a true description of the Early Friends' This assertion appears to be a true description of the Early Friends' doctrine. Nevertheless, whilst the whole Christ, both crucified and risen, is indeed our foundation of faith and hope, yet the death of Christ is the very centre and glory of the grace of salvation. The Four Evangelists all devoted special space to the description of that death. The Apostle Paul preached "Christ crucified." St. Peter dwells repeatedly on the propitiatory sufferings of Christ. St. John prominently proclaims "the Lamb slain." And it is the special work of the Holy Spirit to touch men's heart which with the special work of the Highest "who hath purphesed the Church with Highest." sense of the love of the Highest, "who hath purchased the Church with His

All through the ages, earnest Christians of all sections have naturally shrunk with awe from the idea of entering inside the great veil of Death, into the awful Presence of Sovereign Deity and Immaculate Sanctity, with the many, many dark stains and sins of their past lives upon them, and with so very, very little of good to bring, as any of us have to offer. Even our best prayers, our best actions and our very best worship are so stained. How, then, can we venture before the majesty of God's throne of inviolable law, except with a plea, and on a ground, which does homage, to the uttermost, to that majesty and to that law? But inasmuch as God in Christ has given Himself (and not a second or other "person") for us, and has voluntarily "tasted death for every man," what a grand and solid basis of grace and hope and trust we thus have in Christ's death. What a comfort to millions of poor souls to be able to plead the infinite merits of this "most precious

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